



Politics and International Relations
Undergraduate Dissertations
2018-19

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University of Edinburgh
School of Social & Political Science
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Dissertation Workshops

Politics and International Relations

PLIT10030
Semesters 1+2, Year 4

Key Information

Course Organiser	Dr Stephen Hill Email: stephen.hill@ed.ac.uk Room no. CMB 3.01 15a George Square Guidance & Feedback Hours: Fall term: Wed 2-4pm Spring term: Wed 2-4pm
Location	See detailed programme at the end of the handbook
Course Secretaries	Politics: Claire Buchan Email: Claire.Buchan@ed.ac.uk IR: Euan Morse Email: emorse@ed.ac.uk
Assessment Deadlines	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Poster submission: BOTH ELMA and hardcopy at CMB reception: 12 noon Tuesday 20th November 2018• Poster display: 1-4 pm McEwan Hall December 3rd 2018• Chapter draft: 12 noon Monday 21st January 2019• Dissertation submission: 12 noon, Thursday 25th April 2019

Aims and Objectives

This course prepares students to complete their MA dissertations in Politics and International Relations. It tackles issues such as: formulating a research question, research design, literature review, time management, structure building, abstract writing, referencing, and all other tasks involved in writing a dissertation.

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Introduction

In writing your dissertation, you will draw upon all the skills you have been developing since you started studying politics & IR – reading critically, analysing arguments, collecting data, and writing effectively.

The dissertation requires you to develop your own research question, focusing on a topic of interest to you. **This is an essentially independent project.**

You will need to set your own deadlines for writing drafts and meeting with your supervisor.

See your supervisor as a resource: their job is not to tell you what to do, what your topic should be or to say ‘that’s good enough’, but to help you make your work better – by helping you focus your question, locate the best sources, and draft more effective chapters. Make sure you schedule appointments and/or attend F and G hours.

The point of sending a supervisor a draft chapter is for them to suggest ways for you to improve it. There is no point in submitting a draft to them, unless you make time to consider their suggested changes.

Writing a dissertation is a big challenge for many students, but it can also be very rewarding, if you put in the time and effort!

Who should write a Politics & IR dissertation?

Dissertations are compulsory for students taking single Honours Politics or single Honours International Relations and are open to all those taking Politics as part of a Joint Honours degree.

A number of Joint Honours degrees have a compulsory dissertation project, which students may opt to write either in Politics or in their other subject area. You must decide as soon as possible and make sure that you are registered for the correct course by September 2018 at the latest.

NB: Some joint honors degrees require a Politics dissertation (e.g. Modern Languages); some **do not** allow students to write Politics degrees (e.g. Arabic)

Please check Degree Requirements in the Options Booklet, the online DRPS or with an SSO or your Personal Tutor to confirm which regulations apply to you.

Choosing a topic and writing a proposal

In October, a brief 50 words’ abstract, provisional title and 5 key words must be submitted online via a link, which will be emailed to you. This will enter your proposal onto a secure database. The deadline for the dissertation proposal is **Mon October 8th, noon.**

The abstract should specify the topic you wish to work on, and a preliminary research question.

You will find out who will supervise your work via the Learn page for your dissertation course. You will be notified when this information becomes available.

It is your responsibility to make contact with your supervisor and arrange your first meeting. You can email them and/or attend their F and G hours.

When you email them, it is helpful to introduce yourself and explain that you are writing an Honours dissertation. You may also want to send them a short – 1/2 page – outline of your topic and proposal.

Learning Outcomes

By the end of the course, students will demonstrate:

- an understanding of the complex tasks involved in completing a research project of this size.
- skills related to research design, time management, data analysis, findings, structure, and correct bibliographical referencing.
- research and writing skills to an advanced undergraduate level

Teaching Methods

Full-class meetings

You are expected to attend **the three full-class meetings** convened by the Dissertation Convener. These are intended to convey important information necessary to the smooth development and completion of your dissertation, as well as offering the opportunity for an exchange of ideas between the students as a group, and with the Dissertations Convener. The programme of the full-class meetings can be found at the end of this Handbook – save the dates to your calendar and make sure to attend all of them!

Learn

The Learn pages of the Dissertation Workshops are full of information, samples, tips and materials you can rely on to write the dissertation successfully. Go through everything carefully.

The Dissertations Convener

The dissertations convener is responsible for allocating supervisors, providing general guidance and advice, running dissertation lectures, and resolving any difficulties that may arise.

Supervisors

Students are supported by a member of staff who acts as supervisor.

Supervisors are selected on the basis of research fit, but also workloads, sabbatical programmes, etc. Supervisors will be able to give advice on practical issues such as: the subject and title of the dissertation, its organisation and structure, on source material and the bibliography.

Supervisors can also be expected to comment upon dissertation outlines, chapter plans and timetables, and to provide feedback on around two draft chapters – but no more than 3,000 words – in good time, normally within two weeks of receipt. Remember, the dissertation is **an independent project**.

Supervisors are not expected to direct your work or to comment on the final draft: a dissertation is intended to demonstrate a student's ability to work independently. Remember that supervisors have other commitments, and time must be allowed for them to read and provide feedback on your work.

Students' Responsibilities

You need to find out when your supervisor is available and how soon before a meeting they require written submissions (if they don't specify this, assume 5 working days) and how soon they expect to be able to respond, as a rule, to you. It is reasonable to expect supervisors to respond to email queries within 5 working days (unless they are away), and provide detailed comments on written work within two weeks of receiving it.

This means that you should not expect to be able to submit chapters to supervisors less than two weeks before the final submission date.

Staff will not be available to provide supervision or written feedback during the Christmas and Easter Vacations. It is up to you to make arrangements to meet your supervisor – **they will not chase you for progress reports or draft chapters**. Students should keep a log of meetings with supervisors, including dates of meetings and summaries of discussions.

If you have any difficulties that cannot be resolved between you and your supervisor you should contact the Dissertation Convener.

Assessment

Formative Assessment

1. Poster Display

At the beginning of the writing process, students find it difficult to narrow down their topic, choose a theoretical framework, a method, and/or their case studies. In order to kick start this difficult process of selection and decision-making, students are required to prepare a poster that represents their incipient ideas about the topic and the structure of the dissertation. Detailed guidance will be

provided in the first two meetings of the Dissertation course. Poster samples will be available on LEARN.

The posters will be submitted **via ELMA and hard copy**. The deadline is **Tuesday 20th November at noon**. Submit the hard copy - **a printed A2 version of the poster** - at the Reception in CMB. They will then be displayed for feedback in front of your peers and PIR members of staff on **December 3rd in McEwan Hall 1-4pm**.

Criteria for poster preparation:

- Does the poster identify the dissertation topic and the main research question(s)?
- Does the poster reflect substantive preliminary engagement with the relevant literature?
- Does the poster signal the student's awareness that the project should be theoretically informed?
- Does the poster convey reflection on the methods for collecting and analysing data?
- Does the poster identify the historical and geographical focus of the project?
- Does the student effectively use graphic material to convey all of the above?

2. Draft Chapter Submission

Students are required to submit one draft chapter to their supervisor via email, no later than **Monday 21st January 2019**. Your supervisor will provide detailed feed-back to help you improve your writing.

When submitting a chapter, please name your chapter file something like 'surname_draft_chapter.doc' and not 'my-chapter.doc' or 'thesis_draft.doc'

Criteria for preparing the draft chapter:

- Does the text show an engagement with the literature?
- Does the text go beyond merely summarizing the readings the student has done so far?
- Does the text demonstrate reflexivity and critical thinking in relation to existing arguments and the evidence gathered so far?
- Is the structure of the text well-chosen and effectively implemented?
- Is the text adequately presented in terms of: correct referencing and quoting; spelling, grammar and style; layout and visual presentation?

The Dissertation

The dissertation deadline is **12.00 noon, Thursday 25th April 2019**.

Dissertations will be submitted online via ELMA. Further instructions can be found on LEARN.

Please see the 'Honours Handbook' for further information on: submission of coursework; late penalty waivers; plagiarism; learning disabilities, special circumstances; common marking descriptors; re-marking procedures and appeals.

Please be advised that dissertations will require much more than 15 days to mark. This is due to the length and nature of dissertations, as well as the fact that they must be sent to external examiners before the marks are confirmed.

Technical specifications

- Font: For legibility, we prefer you to use a Times or similar font in 12 point.
- Spacing: You should use at least one-and-a-half line spacing, and leave ample margins.
- Page numbers: Pages should be numbered.
- Length: The maximum length of a dissertation is 10,000 words, including footnotes but excluding the cover page, acknowledgements, acronym/abbreviation list, bibliography, Abstract, Table of Contents, and Appendices.
- Dissertations can and will be checked to confirm the declared word lengths. 2 marks will be deducted for every 100 words or part thereof over the word limit. (There is no 10%+/- allowance/grace).

Plagiarism

Please read the Honours Handbook regarding matters of plagiarism. Dissertations must be your own work. Your dissertation will be assessed for plagiarism using state-of-the art detection software, and penalties will be applied if necessary. Do not take any risks. Use a consistent system of referencing and acknowledge all sources

Marking and Dissertation Assessment Criteria

Dissertations are marked by two members of the Politics & IR subject area. One of the markers is usually your supervisor. Your dissertation may also be read by the external examiner. Dissertation grades are provisional until the Exam Board has met in June.

The following are the criteria through which the Dissertation will be marked. However, it is important to note that the overall mark is a result of a holistic assessment of the assignment as a whole.

- Does the dissertation have a problematic research question or hypothesis that it attempts to answer?
- Does the dissertation effectively engage and show knowledge of relevant academic literature?

- Does the dissertation demonstrate a logical and effective pattern of argument?
- Does the dissertation effectively use primary or secondary evidence in support its argument?
- Does the dissertation demonstrate reflexivity and critical thinking in relation to arguments and evidence?
- Is the structure of the dissertation well-chosen and effectively implemented?
- Is the dissertation adequately presented in terms of: correct referencing and quoting; spelling, grammar and style; layout and visual presentation?

For more info on dissertation marking, scroll down to the bottom of this webpage:

http://www.sps.ed.ac.uk/undergrad/current_students/teaching_and_learning/assessment_and_regulations/marking_descriptors

Communication

This Handbook contains crucial information about the Dissertation course. This should be your first point of call – please read it carefully before emailing the convener or your supervisor asking for information already included here.

The convener will use the LEARN site for all important communication with you. Please check these sites regularly, as well as your university accounts. All students are provided with email addresses on the university system, if you are not sure of your address, which is based on your matric number, check your EUCLID database entry using the Student Portal.

This is the ONLY email address we shall use to communicate with you. Please note that we will NOT use 'private' email addresses such as Yahoo or Gmail; it is therefore essential that you check your university email every day.

You are strongly encouraged to use university email for research related communication with the convener and the supervisor.

Readings and Resource List

This is not a typical undergraduate course. We recommend that you consult some introductory sources to dissertation-writing. The best starting point is Karen Smith et al, *Doing your Undergraduate Social Sciences Dissertation*, which is available via the library as an e-book and in hard copy.

A very good on-line resource about researching and writing undergraduate dissertations in the social sciences is also found at: <http://www.socscidiss.bham.ac.uk/>

Other similar guides include:

Harrison, L (2001), *Political research: an introduction* (London: Routledge)

Murray R (2011), *How to write a thesis* (Buckingham: Open University Press)

Oliver P (2004), *Writing your thesis* (London: Sage)

Silbergh, D (2001), *Doing Dissertations in Politics: a student guide* (London: Routledge).

Teaching Meetings Summary

Full meeting 1: Getting Started. We will focus on the issue of identifying a Research Question and other crucial issues regarding the initial stages of research design. We will cover **the dissertation proposal, due October 8th, noon.**

Full meeting 2: Writing and Structuring. We will discuss research and writing strategies, what makes a good literature review and work on building a structure that includes a timeline. We will also prepare the poster display.

Full meeting 3: Finishing up. We will examine the challenges arising towards the end of the writing process, such as editing and abstract writing.

Writing a Dissertation in PIR: General Guidance

Getting started

Most of you will already have identified a 'topic', but there is a lot more to a dissertation than that. You need to find a research question, identify relevant literature, collect data and plan a schedule.

What is a dissertation?

A dissertation is a 10,000-word written paper, which involves an in-depth exploration of a particular topic. Research can be wholly or largely library-based (involving secondary literature) or can involve empirical data collection (for example through surveys or interviews).

A dissertation is worth 40 credits and is equivalent to two semester-length courses. You should therefore be putting as much time into it as you do to any other year-long course.

On any topic, there are huge numbers of books and articles you could be reading. Remember that you don't have to read everything. You need to be self-disciplined and know when to stop. You are aiming to answer your research question, not discover all there is to know about your broad research subject.

In guiding your time and task management, it is useful to have a chapter outline. This needn't be something you stick to rigidly – you might want to play around with the structure at the writing-up stage if you feel this would make it stronger. This is much easier to do once the work has been done! What a chapter outline will do at this stage is ensure that you are covering everything that you need to cover. This should really be an extension of the proposal you discussed with your supervisor. It is useful to bring your chapter outline to every meeting with your supervisor, and include it whenever you send drafts.

Draw up a list of tasks that you have to do, and draw up a realistic timetable in which to fulfil these tasks. (Examples of a task: to examine government policy on social security, etc., to compile election results, etc.). Then give yourself a realistic timeframe in which to complete this task.

Draft a timetable according to the chapter outline. But be realistic. There is no point in setting goals that you will never attain. There is no point, for example, in saying you'll have written two draft chapters by the beginning of the second term if you know that you're going to be spending Christmas and New Year partying with friends or visiting family! Setting goals that you never attain can also be very demoralising.

At the same time, you should build in time for slippage. It may take longer to do a particular piece of work than you planned. You also need to make sure that you leave enough time for writing-up and editing at the end. You should leave yourself at least two weeks at the end to edit your final draft. Editing is as important as writing.

Ask yourself this: have you put as much time and effort into your dissertation as you have into taught classes where you need to turn up and participate in seminars or tutorials on a regular basis?

Remember that you are not the only student being supervised by your supervisor, and that she or he will have many other commitments as well. You can't expect to hand in a piece of work and get it back the next day. So you should ensure that you leave yourself enough time to submit work and get it back from your supervisor, and be able to consider the suggestions she or he has made.

There is no right way to go about this, but our advice would be to write as you go along, rather than to leave it all until the end. Writing helps you think, as well as the other way around. By writing, you formulate your thoughts and refine your ideas. This should all be part of the research process. You should have a draft chapter written by January 15th, and aim to send your supervisor a second chapter in the first half of the second semester. Your supervisor will provide you with detailed feedback on the text.

Refining your topic and preparing an outline

The outline you send your supervisor at the beginning of the first semester should explain as precisely as possible what topic you intend to research. Bear in mind that this can still be preliminary, and may change as you go on, but it is

still helpful to be as specific as you can. This will enable you to get the most out of your initial supervisory meetings. It should include:

- Proposed title of dissertation
- Topic area (e.g. US politics, gender politics, human rights, etc.)
- Research question (or questions)
- An initial chapter outline
- The sources to be consulted – are you using primary data? Do you need to complete an ethics self-assessment?
- A preliminary discussion of relevant literature – this may be a simple bibliography, an annotated bibliography, or a few paragraphs describing the literature.
- A work plan setting out your timetable

Sources, data and questions

Your dissertation depends on an argument, which answers your research question, and links together the various chapters. In order to develop and defend this argument you need data or evidence, which supports your analysis. This section will help you find sources, select data and develop your argument.

Finding sources

Coursebooks: Look at the reading lists for courses you have already done that relate to your topic. They should guide you to materials that your instructor thinks are good quality.

Supervisors: Ask your supervisor to recommend readings. Depending on your topic, they may or may not be able to do this.

Shelf-marks and Search terms: if you find one book that you already know is relevant, this will lead you to the relevant shelf-mark where you will find books on a related topic. The word cloud on searcher will also help you find related search terms.

Bibliographies: Books and articles that you have read for coursework will make reference to other books that relate to the topic. Use the references in endnotes or bibliographies to lead you to relevant works.

Journals: You are expected to use journal articles as well as books in your literature review. Identify the relevant journals in the library that relate to your topic. Examples of useful journals in politics are: *American Political Science Review*, *Journal of Politics*, *Review of Politics*, *Political Theory*, *Hypatia*, *Journal of Political Philosophy*, *Nations and Nationalism*, *Regional and Federal Studies*, *Scottish Affairs*, *Elections*, *Public Opinion and Parties Yearbook*, *Parliamentary Affairs*, *Political Quarterly*, *International Affairs*, *West European Politics*, etc. International Relations journals include *International Organization*, *International Security*, *European Journal of International Relations*, *Review of International Studies* and *International Studies Quarterly*. Often in bound volumes, one issue will have the index for all of the issues of that year, or they'll all be at the beginning. Sometimes, the index will be found in a separate slim volume.

Databases and gateways:

Use 'searcher' via the Library homepage to search lots of databases at once. Searcher includes books, articles and other resources and links directly to electronic versions held by the library or to the university library catalogue. Alternatively, you can browse the alphabetical listing under 'databases'. Some useful databases include:

Firstsearch/Articlefirst – an extremely useful database. You can search under subject or keyword. It will show you many options. Some will be available on-line, some will be in the Edinburgh University, others will not. Another Firstsearch database is Worldcat, which lists most books published, you can search it in the same way, and using the same searches as Articlefirst.

ASSIA: An international abstracting and indexing tool for health and social science professionals. It provides abstracts from around 650 UK, US and international journals.

Web of Science (<http://wok.mimas.ac.uk/>) The social sciences citation index is likely to be most useful for politics dissertations. You can search on-line for articles published in thousands of journals since 1956. Like Articlefirst, it will give you thousands of returns, you may want to narrow down your search to just focus on the past 5 years, or similar.

Googlescholar: will help you find recent journal articles but it is not as comprehensive as a database like Articlefirst or WoS. Nor does it link you to our catalogue.

Social science gateways are often a very useful way to access relevant material. See, for example, <http://www.jisc.ac.uk/subject/socsci>

NB: Remember that JSTOR is just an archive, like the library shelves. It doesn't include the most recent issues of journals. You need to search databases as well as JSTOR to find recent articles.

Inter-library loan: if a book or article is not available in either the University Library or the National Library of Scotland you can request an inter-library loan. Undergraduate students are entitled to five free ILLs. Each subsequent request will cost you £5, which is subsidized by the University. More information is available on <http://www.lib.ed.ac.uk/services/ill1.shtml> It is helpful if you know that your book or article is available from a UK university. Check COPAC <http://copac.ac.uk/> for the major UK universities or the British Library catalogue. Photocopies of articles or books held at the BL usually take 1-2 weeks to arrive at most, often they are scanned and emailed within a few hours. ILLs can also come from abroad, but this may take longer.

Internet: many organisations in the field of politics now have their own websites, and publish documentation on their web pages that is freely accessible and can be downloaded, but you should be aware that such data is not necessarily reliable.

Masters and PhD dissertations: Can be searched on-line through databases available on the library website. They can be ordered as ILLs.

For students writing a dissertation on development-related topics

The Governance resource centre at Birmingham, <http://www.grc-exchange.org/>: you can search the site, or look at particular themes. They have also compiled very useful subject lists of materials on various themes from public expenditure management to water and sanitation. The British Library for Development Studies at IDS also has a searchable on-line index – accessible from Searcher – and many on-line documents at <http://blds.ids.ac.uk/blds/>. Both these services will send documents to you for a fee – but check, you may find that the library has a subscription, or that it is cheaper to get on ILL. So, for example if you search under NGOs, you would find an abstract of Moore, M. and Stewart, S. 2000, 'Corporate Governance for NGOs?' in D. Eade, ed. *Development, NGOs, and Civil Society*, Oxfam, Oxford, pp. 80-90, which you can also find in our library.

Collecting and using data

If you intend to collect and use primary data, make sure you discuss this with your supervisor before you start your research. Some of our best dissertations have been based on primary research, but you will need to plan ahead. Primary data may include interviews, statistical data from surveys, analysis of newspaper articles, or your observations of an organization or event (e.g. observing participants on a protest march).

If you need special skills or training (e.g. in analysing quantitative data), you should consider taking some research methods courses (see the honours options handbook). If you are going to conduct interviews or focus groups, or carry out participant observation, you need to contact people in advance and allow sufficient time. You will also need to carry out a research ethics self-evaluation – your supervisor will help you with this.

If you intend to base your dissertation on a gap year or a summer placement, talk to your supervisor about this before you leave. And read the section on research ethics below.

Research ethics

All research projects must be assessed for their ethical implications. This includes undergraduate dissertations if you are collecting primary data. If you suspect that this might apply to you, please discuss this with your supervisor, who will assist you in determining what needs to be done to ensure that your research is ethical. Details of the process can be found on the School webpage: http://www.sps.ed.ac.uk/admin/info_research/ethics

Reading academic literature

When you read academic literature, you are not just mining it for 'facts' but also exploring arguments and debates. So, be sure to think about the context –

when was the book or article written? By who? What debates was it engaging with? How did its methodology or theoretical approach shape its contribution?

You may find it helpful to look at book reviews, or follow up articles that cite the item you are reading – Google scholar is very useful for doing that.

It can also be helpful to prepare an annotated bibliography – which just means making notes on what you've read – to help you clarify your thoughts before you write the literature review (which may or may not be the first chapter you write)

Reviewing literature

Reviewing literature is important because it helps you narrow down your topic and formulate your research question. It may become a chapter or a part of a chapter of your dissertation. Not every dissertation will have a chapter called 'the literature review' but every dissertation must show familiarity with the relevant literature.

Before embarking on the literature review, it is imperative that you have clearly identified your topic, and that you have 'unpacked' the topic into its component parts. This should be reflected in the Dissertation Outline, which you have discussed with your Supervisor. A good and focused outline will ensure you are aware of the nature of the problem to be examined, the main research questions stemming from this, the major concepts you want to examine, the theoretical issues raised by your topic, and the empirical questions you need to address in the process of your research.

Whether your dissertation is theoretical or empirical – you still need to have – and demonstrate you have – knowledge of existing literature. Literature review is an ongoing process – you will go back to it when trying to address research questions and understand the data or findings, or elucidate your thoughts. But it is usually expected that you spend a fair amount of time at the beginning familiarising yourself with the literature relevant to your field.

The literature review serves a number of inter-related functions:

- It helps you refine the problem set out in the outline, and to build upon it
- It allows you to develop an in-depth understanding of the subject area in which you are working, and to learn from existing research in this field. This in turn should give you food for thought that informs your own thinking and your own research.
- It provides guidance in addressing some of the research questions set out in your outline – it won't always be necessary to conduct empirical research from scratch if previous research has answered some of these questions for you. Remember there is a limit to what you can do by way of empirical research anyway (time, resources, expertise).
- It helps you gain an understanding about the theoretical and analytical debates that are prominent within current work on your topic. You are expected to engage in these debates.
- It will help you make sense of your data and findings when you gather them.

As well as summarising the views and conclusions expressed by established academics, you are expected to be analytical, to weigh up different arguments and points of view, and to critique existing work, where you take issue with it. Express your opinion in terms of your argument, using evidence to defend your position robustly. This adds scholarly weight to your dissertation. We are looking to see that you have a good understanding of existing literature, that you can see where your work fits in the academic field. We want not only to see that you've read books, articles and reports, but that you've thought about them, given consideration to them, addressed the merit of existing work, maybe even challenged them as a result of your own research.

Three years of University essay writing has already given you most of the skills you need to undertake this task. The difference now is that whereas in essay writing you are usually addressing a set question and using a set reading list in so doing, with the dissertation you set your own question and build your own reading list. There are a number of cautionary points that you should take note of:

- Always retain focus – this is why it is important to have a good research outline that you have discussed with your supervisor. There is no point in aimlessly reading and reading around the general area and hoping this will bring focus to your research. Although you may want to read widely in the beginning when you are defining your topic, as time goes on you will want to narrow down your range of sources.
- Don't waste time on irrelevant material – if half way through a book, you aren't getting much use out of it, ditch it! Don't feel you have to get to the end of a book if it isn't really relevant. Likewise, resist the temptation to use a book just because you read it. We are always looking to see that you have demonstrated the relevance of the material you have read, i.e. how it relates to the specific topic you are addressing.
- Use academic sources and specialist texts. Textbooks may be useful to direct you to the specialist texts, and familiarise you with the key debates, but in themselves, they are not very useful sources – they are too general for this level. The Internet is useful, especially if examining an ongoing issue where the academic textbooks may be behind events, but the internet is never going to be good enough by itself. You must embed your research and your written work in the context of the existing academic literature and debates.
- Don't try to read everything! Part of the challenge of the literature review is selecting the relevant material. You are not expected to have read every book or journal article that relates to your topic. You are expected to have read the key ones. Supervisors can help you identify the key texts. Occasionally, you find Readers on the areas that you are working on (for example, Readers on nationalism or the EU). They tend to include chapters from the key contributors to the field.

Identifying your question/argument

Dissertations need to be coherent. The central research question or argument is what links together your various chapters. The different sections and chapters of the dissertation will all relate to one another, because they help you

explore and explain a specific research problem. So it is vital that you identify and then focus on the central question at the heart of your dissertation, and the related sub-questions that derive from it: what's your point? What's the point of your dissertation?

At this stage, it is important that you are clear about the specific nature of the problem you are going to research. The literature review should help you do this. Having a clear research question, or set of inter-related questions, helps to guide your research and reading. In other words, what questions will you have in your head when conducting your research? What end is your research serving? What are you looking for?

The 'what's your point?' question is a really useful question to ask yourself throughout the process of research and writing your dissertation. This can also be asked as 'So?' or 'So what?' Such a question helps to determine the relevance of the research, the relevance of the information being gathered, and the relevance of the paragraphs you will eventually be writing. If you ask this, and see no relevance, then forget it because it probably isn't relevant!

Define the problem. What is the central hypothesis or question under consideration? This is a key contrast with essays, where the question is set for you. Here you have had to do it yourself, within a broad area of interest (gender and media, Levenson Inquiry, etc.) So, you should provide a statement of the problem – this may include a hypothesis (that A causes B) to be tested, and a central question to be addressed. NB: this should be framed in such a way as to allow you to be analytical. Don't just ask 'how does the electoral system of country X work?' or 'what types of humanitarian intervention did country X engage in, or country Y receive'. Questions like that would lead you to a more descriptive account of a policy, or system. This question wouldn't answer the 'what's your point' or 'so what' question.

What is purpose/aim of the research? Is it to examine a policy, evaluate or develop a theory, analyse the significance or consequences of a political development/event, or what? Why have you chosen this problem for consideration? What has prompted the research? (A change in legislation? A political development? A gap in the literature you have identified?). What is it that makes this an interesting area of study, and an important question to be examined? Try to be precise. It's not enough to say you were curious about how parties fight elections or you were wondering about the effect of devolution. There is no research problem in wondering how something happens or develops. Your statement of the problem must be precise and one that will be examined in the course of your research.

What theoretical approaches help you understand or explain your material? How does it relate to bigger theoretical arguments within political science? Is there an over-arching theoretical framework against which your work can be situated?

What are the sub-questions – the research questions – this has generated? A hypothesis or statement of the problem will have generated a series of research questions to test your hypothesis or examine the problem. Write down the 2 or 3 that are guiding the research that you will be embarking on this term.

Remember here that you have to ensure that you have considered alternatives to your explanation. You may also need to look at the controlling variables, e.g. for a topic on women in parliament it is not enough to look only at the women, but you would also need to look at men.

Writing, analysing and referencing

Finally, you need to pull together your argument and evidence into a bundle of chapters, which will make up your dissertation!

Writing, reading and revising all take place throughout the year, but at some point you will 'start' to write your first chapter. Many people start with a literature review. This helps you identify the relevant literature and identify your research question. Other people find it more helpful to start writing a case study chapter, and then write the literature review when they are more confident about the topic. Some dissertations, for example in Political Theory, integrate the literature review into all chapters, even if there is no chapter called 'THE literature review'.

You should discuss and agree with your supervisor which option is best for you. In the end, your dissertation must show that you are familiar with the literature, whether or not you start by writing a literature review. The important thing is to start writing. Remember, you must submit a draft chapter in Semester 2.

Structure, analysis and argument

We have stressed the need to be clear about the purpose and point of your dissertation. It is important when you go into the writing stage that you have a clear idea of what the dissertation is about. What is the purpose of the dissertation, what is the problem under examination, what is the central contention or argument you are developing, and what central questions does your dissertation raise and address? Having a clear idea of precisely what it is you are examining is essential if you are to build a sound structure.

Set aside sufficient time for the data analysis process and for drafting and redrafting chapters. Keep questioning yourself and your material to identify how it addresses your research questions, and how the material inter-relates. Be prepared to make critical and balanced judgment of the material. Treat data critically and remain focused. Avoid going off at tangents that detract from the purpose of your study. Avoid making exaggerated claims to 'proof', or drawing conclusions your material does not support.

You might find it useful to adopt a system of coding to categorise your material into chapters and sub-themes within chapters, to facilitate the analytic process. In doing this, ensure that your analytical categories are consistent with the aims and objectives of the dissertation.

The structure of the thesis is about giving shape or form to the mass of data and material you have gathered in your research and begun analysing in the data analysis phase. In structuring the dissertation, you need to select the data that is relevant and put it together in a well-organised and coherent manner. There is no set structure that should be adopted. However, the structure you

choose must allow you to examine the different aspects of the problem, idea or issue under study, and each chapter must have its place in relation to the overall theme; the chapters must hang together to form a coherent structure and argument, where the theme has been developed throughout, leading us to the conclusion. Clearly then, deciding how to put the material together and determining which structure to adopt can only be decided once you have a clear idea of the purpose of the project.

Selecting only relevant material: Students will often feel a very natural and human desire to demonstrate the full extent of their labours, to prove how much they've read and how much work they've done. One of key skills in dissertation writing is in selecting only the material that is relevant. That means being prepared to leave out material that does not fit – which may be superfluous or unacceptable in some way. So, think of it as a journey – avoid temptation to meander down side roads that may be interesting but take you off the main track. Leave out what's irrelevant to the central problem being addressed.

Introduction: all dissertations must have an introduction. This should include: A statement of the problem or main theme of the dissertation; a clear expression of the purpose of the dissertation and its rationale; the research questions it has generated; the methodologies or approaches used in examining these questions; why this is an interesting topic of study and what it adds to scholarly work. Include signposts – how the direction of your argument and how the rest of your dissertation will develop.

Conclusion: all dissertations must have a conclusion. This should be used to sum up the main points of the argument and pull the threads together. It returns to statement of problem and purpose of the dissertation and draws conclusions in light of evidence presented. Your conclusion must be consistent with the rest of your argument. It should not come as a surprise to the reader.

Middle bit: there are no set rules about how to structure your dissertation. But the outline and purpose of the dissertation may suggest a particular structure.

The key points with respect to structure are that each chapter must have its place. The relevance of each chapter to the main problem or theme must be clearly explained. Chapters must hang together and flow one into the other. The reader must be able to follow in a logical sequence.

Editing and proof-reading

You are being assessed on your ability to write concisely and effectively on your topic. A dissertation is different from an essay because you receive feedback on your chapters that will help you revise them. You should also read your own drafts critically and think about how you can make them clearer, more effective, and better.

Editing is as important as writing – and there is a lot of scope using 'cut and paste' to move things around, make amendments to structure, etc. Leave time to get it right!

Leave yourself a few days for a break. Put your draft chapters away in a drawer and then come back and read them as though they were someone else's. It is very difficult to criticise your own work (people can be too harsh and too kind to themselves). Try to be an impartial critic. Make an arrangement with fellow students to comment on each other's drafts.

Read your work aloud: this helps expose awkward sentence structure and unclear expression, and helps guard against repetition, poor construction of argument, etc.

Dissertations should not include extraneous text, unnecessarily wordy sentences, or show evidence of inadequate editing.

Referencing

Finally, it is essential that you ensure that your work is properly referenced. This enables your readers to see that you have consulted and engaged with secondary literature, and also to identify the sources of your primary data. It is also an important component of academic honesty that helps ensure you are not vulnerable to accusations of plagiarism.

It is important that you choose a good system of referencing and use it consistently. Ensure that you begin keeping careful records of your sources right from the start of your project.

Detailed advice on referencing is available on the Learn page, the recommended textbook and many other reference manuals available via the library.

Schedule: Important Dates and Deadlines for Your Diary

March 2018	Full-class dissertation preparation meeting in <i>Research Design</i> .
September	Full class meeting, 17th September, 17.10-18.00 Teviot Lecture Theatre (Doorway 5), Medical School.
October	Meet with supervisors
October-November	Students research the literature, trying to narrow down their question. They use poster preparation as an opportunity to make crucial thematic and methodological decisions.
October	Second full class meeting 29th October, 17.10-18.00 Teviot Lecture Theatre (Doorway 5), Medical School.
November	Poster submission via ELMA and hard copy: Tue 20th November, noon. Poster display and feedback Dec 3rd 1-4pm McEwan Hall.
December - January	Students write first chapter and submit it via email to their supervisor no later than the 21st January.
January-March 2019	Meet with supervisors to discuss progress, submit 2 nd draft chapter.
February	Full class meeting 25th February, 16.10 David Hume Tower, Lecture Theatre C
	<i>Please remember, you should not be sending work to your supervisors in the last 2 weeks before the deadline.</i>
	<u>DEADLINE: Submit final dissertation - Thursday 25th April 2019, 12 noon</u>

Appendix 1 – General Information

Students with Disabilities

The School welcomes disabled students with disabilities (including those with specific learning difficulties such as dyslexia) and is working to make all its courses as accessible as possible. If you have a disability special needs which means that you may require adjustments to be made to ensure access to lectures, tutorials or exams, or any other aspect of your studies, you can discuss these with your Student Support Officer or Personal Tutor who will advise on the appropriate procedures.

You can also contact the Student Disability Service, based on the University of Edinburgh, Third Floor, Main Library, You can find their details as well as information on all of the support they can offer at: <http://www.ed.ac.uk/student-disability-service>

Attendance Monitoring

In accordance with the University general degree regulations you are expected to attend all teaching and assessment events associated with all courses that you are enrolled on. The College of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences undertakes routine monitoring of attendance at tutorials and seminars for all students enrolled on courses delivered by Schools within our College. We undertake monitoring of attendance and engagement to enable us to identify where individual students may be experiencing difficulties and to ensure that timely and appropriate intervention can be delivered to provide support and guidance. We also undertake monitoring for sponsored students specifically to meet our obligations to the UKVI. If you miss one or more of your tutorials and/or seminars you may be contacted by your local Student Support Team and be asked to provide an explanation for your absence.

All data is gathered and stored in line with the University policies and guidance on data handling and you can view the privacy statement at:

<https://www.ed.ac.uk/student-systems/use-of-data/policies-and-regulations/privacy-statement>

Learning Resources for Undergraduates

The Study Development Team at the Institute for Academic Development (IAD) provides resources and workshops aimed at helping all students to enhance their learning skills and develop effective study techniques. Resources and workshops cover a range of topics, such as managing your own learning, reading, note-making, essay and report writing, exam preparation and exam techniques.

The study development resources are housed on 'LearnBetter' (undergraduate), part of Learn, the University's virtual learning environment.

Follow the link from the IAD Study Development web page to enrol: www.ed.ac.uk/iad/undergraduates

Workshops are interactive: they will give you the chance to take part in activities, have discussions, exchange strategies, share ideas and ask questions. They are 90 minutes long and held on Wednesday afternoons at 1.30pm or 3.30pm. The schedule is available from the IAD Undergraduate web page (see above).

Workshops are open to all undergraduates but you need to book in advance, using the MyEd booking system. Each workshop opens for booking two weeks before the date of the workshop itself. If you book and then cannot attend, please cancel in advance through MyEd so that another student can have your place. (To be fair to all students, anyone who persistently books on workshops and fails to attend may be barred from signing up for future events).

Study Development Advisors are also available for an individual consultation if you have specific questions about your own approach to studying, working more effectively, strategies for improving your learning and your academic work. Please note, however, that Study Development Advisors are not subject specialists so they cannot comment on the content of your work. They also do not check or proof read students' work.

To make an appointment with a Study Development Advisor, email iad.study@ed.ac.uk

(For support with English Language, you should contact the English Language Teaching Centre).

Discussing Sensitive Topics

The discipline of Politics and International Relations addresses a number of topics that some might find sensitive or, in some cases, distressing. You should read this Course Guide carefully and if there are any topics that you may feel distressed by you should seek advice from the course convenor and/or your Personal Tutor.

For more general issues you may consider seeking the advice of the Student Counselling Service, <http://www.ed.ac.uk/schools-departments/student-counselling>

Guide to Using LEARN for Online Workshop Sign-Up

The following is a guide to using LEARN to sign up for your workshop. If you have any problems using the LEARN sign up, please contact the relevant course secretary by email.

Step 1 – Accessing LEARN course pages

Access to LEARN is through the MyEd Portal. You will be given a log-in and password during Freshers' Week. Once you are logged into MyEd, you

should see a tab called 'Courses' which will list the active LEARN pages for your courses under 'myLEARN'.

Step 2 – Welcome to LEARN

Once you have clicked on the relevant course from the list, you will see the Course Content page. There will be icons for the different resources available, including one called 'Workshop Sign Up'. Please take note of any instructions there.

Step 3 – Signing up for your Workshop

Clicking on Tutorial Sign Up will take you to the sign up page where all the available workshop groups are listed along with the running time and location.

Once you have selected the group you would like to attend, click on the 'Sign up' button. A confirmation screen will display.

IMPORTANT: If you change your mind after having chosen a tutorial you cannot go back and change it and you will need to email the course secretary. Reassignments once tutorials are full or after the sign-up period has closed will only be made in exceptional circumstances.

Tutorials have restricted numbers and it is important to sign up as soon as possible.

External Examiner

The External Examiner for the PIR Dissertations PIR are Matthew Goodwin, University of Kent and Iseult Honohan, University College Dublin.

Appendix 2 - Course Work Submission and Penalties

Penalties that can be applied to your work and how to avoid them.

There are three types of penalties that can be applied to your course work and these are listed below. Students **must** read the full description on each of these at:

http://www.sps.ed.ac.uk/undergrad/current_students/teaching_and_learning/assessment_and_regulations/coursework_penalties

Make sure you are aware of each of these penalties and know how to avoid them. Students are responsible for taking the time to read guidance and for ensuring their coursework submissions comply with guidance.

- **Incorrect submission Penalty**

When a piece of coursework is submitted to our Electronic Submission System (ELMA) that does not comply with our [submission guidance](#) (wrong format, incorrect document, no cover sheet etc.) a penalty of **5 marks** will be applied to students work.

- **Lateness Penalty**

If you miss the submission deadline for any piece of assessed work **5 marks will be deducted for each calendar day that work is late, up to a maximum of seven calendar days (35 marks)**. Thereafter, a mark of zero will be recorded. There is no grace period for lateness and penalties begin to apply immediately following the deadline.

- **Word Count Penalty**

The penalty for excessive word length in coursework is **one mark deducted for each additional 20 words over the limit**.

Word limits vary across subject areas and submissions, so check your course handbook. Make sure you know what is and what is not included in the word count. Again, check the course handbook for this information.

You will not be penalised for submitting work below the word limit. However, you should note that shorter essays are unlikely to achieve the required depth and that this will be reflected in your mark.

ELMA: Submission and Return of Coursework

Coursework is submitted online using our electronic submission system, ELMA. You will not be required to submit a paper copy of your work.

Marked coursework, grades and feedback will be returned to you via ELMA. You will not receive a paper copy of your marked course work or feedback.

For details of how to submit your course work to ELMA, please see our webpages [here](#). Remember, there is a [5 mark incorrect submission penalty](#), so read the guidance carefully and follow it to avoid receiving this.

Extensions:

If you have good reason for not meeting a coursework deadline, you may request an extension. Before you request an extension, make sure you have read all the guidance on our [webpages](#) and take note of the key points below. You will also be able to access the online extension request form through our [webpages](#).

- Extensions are granted for 7 calendar days.
- Extension requests must be submitted no later than 24 hours before the coursework deadline.
- If you miss the deadline for requesting an extension for a valid reason, you should submit your coursework as soon as you are able, and apply for Special Circumstances to disregard penalties for late submission. You should also contact your Student Support Officer or Personal Tutor and make them aware of your situation.
- If you have a valid reason and require an extension of more than 7 calendar days, you should submit your coursework as soon as you are able, and apply for Special Circumstances to disregard penalties for late submission. You should also contact your Student Support Officer or Personal Tutor and make them aware of your situation.
- If you have a Learning Profile from the Disability Service allowing you potential for flexibility over deadlines, you must still make an extension request for this to be taken into account.

Plagiarism Guidance for Students: Avoiding Plagiarism

Material you submit for assessment, such as your essays, must be your own work. You can, and should, draw upon published work, ideas from lectures and class discussions, and (if appropriate) even upon discussions with other students, but you must always make clear that you are doing so. **Passing off anyone else's work** (including another student's work or material from the Web or a published author) **as your own is plagiarism** and will be punished severely.

When you upload your work to ELMA you will be asked to check a box to confirm the work is your own. All submissions will be run through 'Turnitin', our plagiarism detection software. Turnitin compares every essay against a constantly-updated database, which highlights all plagiarised work. Assessed work that contains plagiarised material will be awarded a mark of zero, and serious cases of plagiarism will also be reported to the College Academic Misconduct officer. In either case, the actions taken will be noted permanently on the student's record. **For further details on plagiarism see the Academic Services' website:**

<http://www.ed.ac.uk/schools-departments/academic-services/students/undergraduate/discipline/plagiarism>

Data Protection Guidance for Students

In most circumstances, students are responsible for ensuring that their work with information about living, identifiable individuals complies with the requirements of the Data Protection Act. The document, *Personal Data Processed by Students*, provides an explanation of why this is the case. It can be found, with advice on data protection compliance and ethical best practice in the handling of information about living, identifiable individuals, on the Records Management section of the University website at:

<https://www.ed.ac.uk/records-management/policy/data-protection>